

229hh- Calming The Pain Not Avoiding It

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What is 'meditation'?

In the broadest terms, if a person were not to know what meditation is, and have no notion of any techniques, the answer to that question would be that 'it's a way of calming your mind.'

It is learning how to calm your mind down skillfully, *without* involving sensuality or distraction: that is the wisdom, the work and the value of it. Most people simply follow their sense desires to acquire sense pleasures so that the mind calms down in regard to something else that bothers them. In other words, it's just a cover up, pasting a cover on the wound that you don't want to deal with. Underneath it is still the same wound.

That is the difference between doing meditation for the right reasons, and doing meditation for the wrong reasons. Are you doing meditation just to get away from things, to not deal with them? Or, to calm your mind *in regard to* the things that are still there, that are otherwise agitating you? Am I trying to avoid the pain, or am I trying to calm my mind in regard to the pain, not trying to get rid of it - that is the fundamental difference there.

That's why it is important what view a person carries in regard to meditation. Most contemporary meditation notions - even when people have genuine reasons [initially behind wanting to practice it] - imply some sort of special pleasant experience that you will get if you commit to a technique, a pleasure which will overwhelm you, and easily allow yourself to conclude that you had a very 'successful meditation'.

That is not 'calming' to begin with; and also it is in line with the same principal of sensuality, i.e. 'I'm bothered; let me do certain things - let me work, let me gain - and then [as a result of my efforts] let me enjoy this vast amount of pleasure that will make me very satisfied'.

Sometimes people realise that sensuality cannot really provide that [lasting satisfaction] - then they turn to meditation, but they don't change their attitude. The whole idea of jhanas being a pleasure that overwhelms you, a kind of ecstasy - is the exact same view of sensuality, just replacing the object that you usually chase with a different one.

Would you consider yourself to be calming yourself down; while you are cultivating expectations, asking 'when will this pleasure arrive, when will it happen to me'? Is anticipation a calming quality? Of course not, but how many people can truly say they can meditate without the slightest view of anticipation? It is implicit when one comes across meditation contemporarily, Buddhist or otherwise. Looking for *what's happening*, so that you can interpret 'what's happening', waiting for things to happen, *hoping* they will happen... that is meditating with sensuality. Waiting for *pleasant things to happen* that will sort everything else out.

“The Blessed One, brahmin, did not praise every type of meditation, nor did he condemn every type of meditation. What kind of meditation did the Blessed One not praise? Here, brahmin, someone abides with his mind obsessed by sensual lust, a prey to sensual lust, and he does not understand as it actually is the escape from arisen sensual lust. While he harbours sensual lust within, he meditates, premeditates, out-meditates, and mismeditates. He abides with his mind obsessed by ill will, a prey to ill will...with his mind obsessed by sloth and torpor, a prey to sloth and torpor...with his mind obsessed by restlessness and remorse, a prey to restlessness and remorse...with his mind obsessed by doubt, a prey to doubt, and he does not understand as it actually is the escape from arisen doubt. While he harbours doubt within, he meditates, premeditates, out-meditates, and mismeditates. The Blessed One did not praise that kind of meditation.” - Mn108

“When he harbors aversion toward painful feeling, the underlying tendency to aversion toward painful feeling lies behind this. Being contacted by a painful feeling, he seeks delight in sensual pleasure. For what reason? Because the untrained ordinary person does not know of any escape from painful feeling other than sensual pleasure.” - Sn36.6

When touched by pain, the only thing an untrained ordinary person knows is to seek pleasure. It doesn't matter whether he seeks pleasure through food, company, others - or meditation. *He seeks pleasure, because he doesn't want to deal with the pain.* That is why it is a sensual view that underlies that meditation - any meditation of that kind.

Meditation is not about replacing the experience that has arisen, it is about thoroughly knowing it while it's there. But the point will come when, in order to fully understand it, you need to learn how to stay calm, within it - and that is the role of the proper *samadhi*.

That is why the right view is the necessary basis for the right *samadhi*, because the right view will know that it is about enduring disorder. The mind is disturbed because the mind is not free, but if I just seek to replace this disturbance with a pleasurable experience, I haven't understood what needs to be understood. So what if I instead seek to calm myself *within* the disturbing experience and within the agitated mind? Then the agitation disappears; so that, although that which agitated you is still there, now you get to understand it, because the mind sees clearly when it is calm.

The pleasure that the Buddha talks about, the pleasure that is different from the pleasure of sensuality - is that very pleasure of not being bothered, pleasure of being withdrawn, pleasure of sense restraint.

It is a pleasure that you cannot crave for more of, because it didn't come in that external sense of just replacing [one experience with another] - as in just something that overwhelms you. Even the pleasure of *jhana* is the pleasure of that withdrawal from beforehand, that is what the pleasure belongs to, not to the *jhana* [as such]. It is a result of that seclusion and non-activity.

“Here, bhikkhus, withdrawn from sense desire, withdrawn from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna/meditation ... the second meditation ... the third meditation ... the fourth meditation. This is called the pleasure of renunciation, the pleasure of seclusion, the pleasure of peace, the

pleasure of enlightenment. I say of this kind of pleasure that it should be pursued, that it should be developed, that it should be cultivated, and that it should not be feared.” - Mn139

What is truly disturbing is that movement of the mind - and you *seeking pleasure* is just another movement. Another expectation, another anticipation, whether you get it or not doesn't matter - you are still relying on the perpetual movement of the mind, to remain floating. That is not peaceful or calming, even if you get all the pleasure you want in the world. So the true *samatha*, then is calming of those movements and those activities, or *sankharas*, intentions of the mind - calming that, within whatever you are intending towards, or against.

Right meditation comes within right endurance

Patient endurance is the supreme austerity (Dhp 184)

In order to calm your intentions on the mental level, you need to have calmed your body and speech, restrained it sufficiently long beforehand. THEN you can actually start calming that movement, the movement of the mind - but not at the expense of what is agitating you, that remains; that actually serves almost as a criteria for whether you are calm now, or not. It's easy to be calm when there is nothing bothering you. But the very reason people don't want to live in seclusion, not partake in company, and guard the sense doors - is that it is very disturbing.

That is why the gradual training is about *building that up*, because that is the most disturbing thing. When you start saying no to desiring sense pleasures and guarding the sense doors, avoiding company, it is very disturbing for the mind that depends on those movements, engagements and activities. Solitude, seclusion, withdrawal from the senses, confinement - it basically feels like dying. It is the withdrawal of a heavy addiction: [your mind is] an addict who has been depending on the senses for aeons, not only this life. If you think cigarettes are hard to give up, or heroin, try giving up the entire domain of pleasure dependent on the senses and existence in general.

Q. Even on that small scale in terms of little things like addiction to smoking, you can get a glimpse of the relief that comes from not being agitated anymore by that particular craving.

Ajahn Nyanamoli: Imagine then the pleasure of the first *jhana*; when you are not drawn by anything in the world. No addiction, you are completely dry of it, such that even if you have thoughts [of sensual objects?], they are not *sensual thoughts* in the sense of thoughts that would immediately pressure you. That's a true relief, a true peace, laying down a burden. But there is no magical way to achieve this, i.e - 'watch your left nostril, watch your right, three steps left' - there is only the withdrawal from that which you are addicted to. That is the 'magical way'; and you need to be *sufficiently* withdrawn. For how long, depends on how strongly you were addicted.

Mn.107 - The Discourse to Ganaka-Moggallana:

“...When the Tathāgata gets a person fit to be tamed, he first trains him thus:

‘(1) Come, bhikkhu. Be virtuous. Dwell restrained in accordance with the Pāṭimokkha, consummate in your behavior & sphere of activity. Train yourself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.’

“When the monk is virtuous... seeing danger in the slightest faults, the Tathāgata then trains him further:

‘(2) Come, monk. Be one who is guarded in the doors of your sense faculties. On seeing a form with the eye, don’t grasp at any signs and features (significance) by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the eye. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. On hearing a sound with the ear.... On smelling an aroma with the nose.... On tasting a flavor with the tongue.... On touching a tactile sensation with the body.... On cognizing an idea with the intellect, don’t grasp at any signs and features by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the intellect. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the intellect.’

“When the monk is one who is guarded in the doors of his sense faculties... the Tathāgata then trains him further:

‘(3) Come, monk. Be one who eats for the right reasons. With a correct perspective (yonisomanasikara), take your food not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification, but simply for the survival and continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, “I will destroy old feelings & not create new feelings. Thus I will maintain myself, be blameless, and live in comfort.”’
“When the monk is one who eats for the right reasons... the Tathāgata then trains him further:

‘(4) Come, monk. Be one who is devoted to wakefulness. During the day, sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the first watch of the night, sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the second watch of the night, reclining on your right side, take up the lion’s posture, one foot placed on top of the other, mindful, alert, with your mind set on getting up [either as soon as you awaken or at a particular time]. During the last watch of the night, sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states.’

“When the monk is one who is devoted to wakefulness/vigilance... the Tathāgata then trains him further:

‘(5) Come, monk. Be one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness. When going forward & returning, make yourself aware. When looking toward & looking away.... When bending & extending your limbs.... When carrying your outer cloak, upper robe, & bowl.... When eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting.... When urinating & defecating.... When walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, make yourself aware.’

“When the monk is one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness... The Tathāgata then trains him further:

‘(6)Come, monk. Seek out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw.’

“He seeks out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After his meal, returning from his alms round, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body upright, and brings mindfulness to the fore.

“(7)Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic to the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.

“(8)Having abandoned these five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite secluded from sense desire, secluded from unskillful things, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: joy & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought & evaluation... the second jhāna...the third jhāna, the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.” - Mn107

Ajahn Nyanamoli: That's the 'technique.' The technique of basically overcoming *the* addiction of the addictions - i.e. the addiction of the senses - without replacements. People can often replace it, committing to something else, even more activity, work, perpetual distraction, company - which would keep the mind away from actually seeking sense pleasures on a course level, but without uprooting anything. It is just like a heroin addict finding something else to keep his mind addicted to, which is not dealing with it. The moment those activities become unavailable, the resting place of his mind is where his addiction still is, so he will go back to that which he hasn't uprooted.

So that is what 'meditation' is - once you have sufficiently, wholesomely disturbed your mind by unwavering sense restraint, seclusion, guarding of the sense doors - now you learn to calm within that. Not abandon it, but calm; still the agitation aspect of it, so that you can carry on, because you realise that that's the way out.

“The Blessed One said, “Monks, do you develop mindfulness of in-&out breathing?”

When this was said, Ven. Arittha replied to the Blessed One, “I develop mindfulness of in-&out breathing, lord.”

“But how do you develop mindfulness of in-&out breathing, Arittha?”

“Having abandoned sensual desire for past sensual pleasures, lord, having done away with sensual desire for future sensual pleasures, and having thoroughly subdued perceptions of irritation with regard to internal & external events, I breathe in mindfully and breathe out mindfully.” - Sn54.6

[There is no specific instruction that can be given on how to do this, because] that would become another activity you will now *do*. The only way to do it is to endure it, and through that endurance, when you have no room to move left, right, forward or backward, you will find the way to calm yourself - BY not moving left, right, forward or backward.

That's also why you cannot accidentally become enlightened - who would accidentally become free from addiction through enduring the pain of withdrawal for six months? Without a reason, without a determined goal to go through that and do that work? Who would accidentally somehow just choose to do that for so long that they then become free? There has to be some knowledge, and some will behind it, to commit to that training and see benefit in it. Again - cigarettes, alcohol, heroin, all are particular addictions, *within* sensuality. Now you are giving up the entire domain of pleasure that is based on activity through the senses.

The only way to overcome such addiction to sensuality is by gradual training.

Gradual training means developing a wide base of virtue, a wide base of sense restraint, eating for the right reasons, and watchfulness. Then all the struggles that your mind will go through from that supreme withdrawal, you can calm within that without falling from that wide base.

That is why from the point of view of developing your mind, it is actually better to start by keeping even the five precepts, but taking them for *the rest of your life*. The five precepts for the rest of your life is what would start to become that 'wide base' - and it has to be done in that sense. A heroin addict will not free himself if he goes to rehab only on the weekends and then continues as normal throughout the week. So take on the five precepts - forever. That is already going to be a confinement for the mind that is addicted to chasing sense pleasures - and that's the weight you need to start taking on in the gradual training, it's the whole point. That's what the lay followers in suttas did:

"We go for refuge to Master Gotama, to the teaching, and to the sangha of monks. From this day forth, may Master Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge for life." - Mn150

It means that five precepts are now the basis of your sense restraint and confinement, which is very easy, not even really confining - but they must be taken in the ultimate sense. Then, if on top of that you want to sometimes keep the eight precepts, good; but then if you don't keep the eight precepts there is no falling lower than the five precepts, that is your basis. And that must remain your basis.

Then, if you do really want to free yourself once and for all, or at least make an attempt for it, then you should take the eight precepts - again, in the ultimate sense, *for the rest of your life*.

Through that, because now that's something you must protect, you're forced to be mindful. You're forced to be moderate and not overdo things that would make you spill out and break the precepts. You're forced to guard your senses; because if you don't, it becomes very unpleasant in the confinement of the eight precepts. That's how you start taming your mind.

Mn125 - Taming the wild elephant simile:

“Suppose, Aggivessana, that a king addresses his woodsman, ‘Come, my good woodsman. Mount a royal elephant, enter the woods, and when you find a wilderness elephant, bind it by the neck to the royal elephant.’

“Responding, ‘Yes, your majesty,’ the woodsman mounts a royal elephant, enters the woods and, finding a wilderness elephant, binds it by the neck to the royal elephant. Then the royal elephant leads it out into the open air. It’s to this extent that the wilderness elephant has come into the open air, for wilderness elephants long for the woods. “Then the woodsman informs the king, ‘Your majesty, the wilderness elephant has come into the open air.’

“The king then addresses his elephant tamer, ‘Come, my good elephant tamer. Tame the wilderness elephant. Break it of its wilderness habits, its wilderness memories and intentions, its distraction, fatigue, and fever over leaving the wilderness. Make it enjoy the town and teach it habits congenial to human beings.’

“Responding, ‘Yes, your majesty,’ the elephant tamer then plants a large post in the ground and binds the wilderness elephant to it by the neck in order to break it of its wilderness habits, its wilderness memories and resolves, its distraction, fatigue, and fever over leaving the wilderness, to make it delight in the town and to teach it habits congenial to human beings.

“The elephant tamer then speaks to the wilderness elephant words that are soothing, pleasing to the ear, affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing and pleasing to people at large. When the wilderness elephant is spoken to with words that are soothing, pleasing to the ear, affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing & pleasing to people at large, it listens, lends ear, and exerts its mind to understand. The elephant tamer then further rewards it with grass, fodder, and water. When the wilderness elephant accepts the elephant tamer’s grass, fodder, and water, that’s when the elephant tamer knows, ‘Now the wilderness elephant will live!’

“Then the elephant tamer makes the wilderness elephant perform further tasks: ‘Pick this up, sir. Put this down, sir.’ When the wilderness elephant obeys the elephant tamer’s instructions to pick up and put down as it is told, the elephant tamer makes it perform further tasks: ‘Go forward. Go back.’ When the wilderness elephant obeys the elephant tamer’s instructions to go forward and go back as it is told, the elephant tamer makes it perform further tasks: ‘Get up. Lie down.’

“When the wilderness elephant obeys the elephant tamer’s instructions to get up and lie down as it is told, the elephant tamer makes it perform a further task called immovability. The elephant tamer ties a giant shield to its trunk. A man with a lance in his hand sits on its neck. Men with lances in their hands stand surrounding it on all sides, while the elephant tamer, with a long lance pole in his hand, stands in front of it. As it is made to perform the task of immovability, it doesn’t move its forefeet or its hind feet, it doesn’t move its forequarters or its hindquarters, it doesn’t move its head, it doesn’t move its ears, it doesn’t move its tusks, it doesn’t move its tail, it doesn’t move its trunk. It is a royal elephant that endures attacks from spears, swords, arrows, and axes;

and resounding beats of drums, cymbals, conchs, and tom-toms. Rid of all faults and defects, purged of flaws, it is worthy of the king....”

Ajahn Nyanamoli:

So you're not just seeking a pleasant experience to replace the other one, you are uprooting all of it. So that's 'meditation.' Calming amidst that. When there is withdrawal, the wild mind still kicks and screams, and now you are calming it *without* abandoning withdrawal, *without* giving in to the senses, *without* letting the elephant go back to the jungle to have a break.

Then there is no going back - [which is the very meaning of] 'non-return'. One who abandons sensuality is *not coming back to this world*, for that very reason. He has abandoned dependence on anything from this world. It is not a poetic name, 'non-return', but factual. He is never returning to any previous addiction, it's inconceivable - like a stone split in half cannot be drawn together, irreversible. If you accomplish 'going against the grain', going against samsara, it's irreversible, you can't go back down, impossible. That's why the free mind is known as 'free mind.'

Q. An alcoholic might not drink for ten years, but could still go back...

Ajahn Nyanamoli: Yes, because they haven't uprooted their view of sensuality. But even in that sense, you can get a glimpse of the same principle. Suppose you free yourself from that addiction to cigarettes for example - then you go back to cigarettes and it is sickening. It would take a lot of effort to work through that and become addicted again. And it's kind of impossible for you to now go through that work carelessly, knowing what you have been through, when you have truly freed yourself from the addiction of it.

[In the same way,] having fully uprooted the view of sensuality, fully understood the danger of it, it's just impossible for the mind to even entertain that as a possibility anymore. Literally that elephant, you dragged out of the forest to train it, and now that elephant has finally understood, for himself, the peril of going back there. Now you can unhook it, you can remove all the straps, it will not go back there because it was actually unpleasant and always was. Sensuality is only relatively pleasant because of your mental condition, the addiction to it, the need to scratch the itch.

Would the leper who is free from his condition, even consider burning himself with that ember from before, that would cause immense pain, unbearable pain? When the reason that was making it provide him with that relative pleasure is gone, it just becomes inconceivable for him to do that.

“Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterising his body over a burning charcoal pit. Then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a physician to treat him. The physician would make medicine for him, and by means of that medicine the man would be cured of his leprosy and would become well and happy, independent, master of himself, able to go where he likes. Then two strong

men would seize him by both arms and drag him towards a burning charcoal pit. What do you think, Māgandiya? Would that man twist his body this way and that?"

"Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because that fire is indeed painful to touch, hot, and scorching."

"What do you think, Māgandiya? Is it only now that that fire is painful to touch, hot, and scorching, or previously too was that fire painful to touch, hot, and scorching?"

"Master Gotama, that fire is now painful to touch, hot, and scorching, and previously too that fire was painful to touch, hot, and scorching. For when that man was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, his faculties were impaired; thus, though the fire was actually painful to touch, he acquired a mistaken perception of it as pleasant."

"So too, Māgandiya, in the past sensual pleasures were painful to touch, hot, and scorching; in the future sensual pleasures will be painful to touch, hot, and scorching; and now at present sensual pleasures are painful to touch, hot, and scorching. But these beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures, who are devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, who burn with fever for sensual pleasures, have faculties that are impaired; thus, though sensual pleasures are actually painful to touch, they acquire a mistaken perception of them as pleasant."

Mn75
